

**Start Strong Council Task Force Meetings**  
**Capital One West Creek Campus**  
**September 6, 2006 · 10AM – 3PM**

Dr. Morris, Secretary of Education, called the meeting to order at 10AM and welcomed task force members.

At this time Dean Clifford, Judy Heiman and Kathy Glazer reviewed the background materials distributed to task force members. Information discussed included:

- **Initial Work of the Start Strong Council**
  - Vision and Values for Virginia's Pre-K
  - Highlights of research/best practices information
  - Pre-K models reviewed by the Council
  - National Pre-K efforts
  - VA work
    - Existing early childhood programs
    - Learning emerging from community grants
    - Early Childhood Foundation
    - Alignment project
      - Early Learning Guidelines
      - Core Competencies
      - Program Standards
      - Statewide Career Lattice
      - Voluntary Quality Rating System
    - Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives

At this time members reported to their respective task forces. The five task forces (Standards, Public Engagement, Professional Development, Governance, and Finance) met from 11AM-3PM. Notes from each group are reported.

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**Finance Task Force Meeting** – Members present included: Mike Harreld; Chair, Rosemary Burton, Jeff Cobb, Jim Duty, Gordon Gentry, Rob Krupicka, Sherman LaPrade, Mike Ludwick, Cassandra Peters, Dan Sleeper, and Carolyn Tyler.

Following introductions, the group discussed points of agreement and concern regarding the overview provided in the large group meeting:

- Regional equity will be important to the success of this initiative. It must reach all of the “three Virginias.”
- It is important for planners to understand the economics of child care, especially the role of four-year-old care in subsidizing care of younger children and infants. A public program that moves four-year-olds out of private settings could put child care providers out of business, jeopardizing care for children younger than four.
- The need for after-school care can provide opportunities for private / community-based sites.
- Increasing diversity within the state and the resegregation of communities will pose challenges to education in general and to this initiative in particular.

- There is a need to challenge the status quo – current VPI funding is not sufficient to provide quality care. In addition the local match is prohibitive for some localities.
- Different regions may have vastly different situations with respect to availability of space, capacity in school buildings, capacity in community-based settings, and concentration of at-risk populations.
- Benchmarking and evaluation will be very important to gaining legislative support. The program should be designed and funded with evaluation in mind.
- It may be beneficial to segment the populations to be served. There is a need for additional slots for at-risk children as traditionally defined. There is also a huge need for middle-class families that do not qualify for means-tested programs. These tend to be young families, early in their careers, with insufficient savings to support enrollment in expensive private programs. A loan or tax credit program could assist this population.
- Recruiting qualified teachers is a huge problem. Professional development benefits teachers and public schools as private sector workers earn degrees and move to the public system, but we must ensure adequate throughput at the entry level to provide a steady supply at all levels.

Mike Harreld shared some lessons learned in Kentucky, where he served on the Louisville School Board at the time Kentucky's preschool program was started, particularly with respect to unintended consequences, such as the impact on private providers. He emphasized the importance of having the private providers as partners.

Cassandra Peters noted that Success by Six has initiated a voluntary quality rating system in Richmond with support from Capital One. They have spent several hundred thousand dollars to get 10 – 15 centers up to high standards.

#### Strategies proposed

1. Training for new teachers, partnering with community colleges and four-year colleges. May involve addressing the licensure impediments.
  2. Look at VPI funding level.
  3. Consider exempting pre-K from local match requirements, or using a formula other than the composite index, or phasing in the requirement to meet the match, so that localities could work up to full matching over a few years.
  4. Create a win for the middle – some help for those who can't fully afford quality care but don't qualify for existing federal and state funded programs.
  5. Pilot programs addressing several possible areas: quality rating system, assessment and evaluation, blending of programs with different funding streams, incorporation of private sites for pre-K and for after-school care for children in part-day pre-K, teacher training and ways to increase throughput, perhaps by partnering with private providers for locations, funding for local councils to allocate within a range of specified priorities and quality requirements.
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**Governance Task Force Meeting** - The group made introductions and described their backgrounds. Those members in attendance included: Judith Rosen; Chair, Toni Cacace-Beshears,

Darlene Burcham, Tom Brewster, Deborah Jonas, Jill Robinson, Delegate Ken Plum, Audrey Davidson, Fred Morton, and Gail Johnson. Staff present included: Doug Garcia and Jennie Moline.

Judith Rosen suggested that the group should focus on short term goals and asked what everyone wanted to accomplish in the meeting, i.e. what goals should the group have for state and for local governance in the area of pre-k.

The group then started in on specific issues that face pre-k in Virginia. The main concern was that there is a lack of communication between public pre-k programs, private programs, public schools, etc. Fred Morton brought up that Henrico County has a blended program and that there is articulation between public and private pre-k and the kindergarten programs that will be accepting these children. Judith Rosen pointed out that in Fairfax County; the structure of their system has made communication between the various actors easier.

At this point Delegate Plum suggested that the group begin making a list of broad goals.

### **GOALS**

- Articulation among existing pre-k programs (head start, VPI, public/private)
- Clear definition between childcare and preschool
- High standards for all programs
- Easy access for all programs
- Programs should not duplicate and should fill the gap for all children
- Clearly identified manager at state and local level (school system)
- Need to be flexible with respect to physical locations in the period in which more private facilities are being used
- Let the money go to those existing programs who are meeting standards and also making progress
- Should have a transition process built in
- Streamline funding process – it is not necessary to start from scratch, only to improve existing funding process
- Involve parents
- Program evaluations
- Market-driven governance
- Provide funds for local planning group similar to the Governor's Working Group
  - with no matching requirement so that all localities can participate
  - group should be more operational in nature and not advisory
- Seamless transition – get providers to come to local Start Strong council meetings
- Public awareness with the business community – stress the economic development and investment in our future aspects of pre-k – creates a stronger voice
- Clearly defined roles for state and local agencies, private providers
  - A state level leader for pre-k – Cabinet secretary? State agency?
- Make sure that every dollar is spent on programs that meet the standards (QRS)
- Fund the individual children, not the programs

The group also discussed a potential structure of having localities or regions use the model of the Governor's Working Group to ensure communication among all of the existing programs. This group would include local department of social services officials, school officials, city/county administrators, etc.

Secretary Morris joined the group and brought up several topics for discussion. He asked the group if they had \$30 million dollars to invest in any part of pre-k what would they choose. The consensus was that the money should be used to build up and incentivize the Quality Rating System to increase quality and include more children.

In order to decide what governing bodies should be in charge of pre-k issues the group decided that it needed to look at other states' approaches. Secretary Morris then shared with the group that the Finance Task Force had been having discussions that took the pre-k recommendations in a different direction. The Finance Task Force wanted to expand the VPI and include a private sector requirement percentage like in the New York pre-k program. The Governance group responded by giving their initial, unofficial recommendation that the state fund the 5-star Quality Rating System with incentives and private providers will be included due to the fact that no new facilities would be built. This plan would include accountability and the possibility for a new successful program, both aspects that would make the legislature more likely to follow the plan as opposed to simply increasing funding for VPI.

The group then tried to decide who would set and monitor standards for the pre-k program. Several members of the group suggested using the existing licensing infrastructure and enforcement abilities to monitor and implement the Quality Rating System. It was argued that this might not work due to the fact that the licensing system is required whereas the standards system would be voluntary.

Secretary Morris informed the group that after meeting with the Governor and several public school superintendents that the superintendents want control over any expansion of pre-k. The group agreed that this is why we would let the superintendents be part of the local working groups. If the superintendents and the private sector providers are both included in the local working groups then the increase in communications will improve the initial planning stages. Judith Rosen pointed to the example of the Fairfax County School Readiness Task Force. This group included principals, childcare providers, and preschool providers.

The issue of special education pre-k was brought up by Jill Robinson who is a principal at special needs pre-school. She said her biggest problem is with service coordination. With so many different actors in the pre-k system it is difficult to get special needs children in the best programs.

Jennie and Doug will follow up with some questions that the group had. We will provide some examples of Governance models in other states and also some existing models in Virginia that includes representatives from various agencies and stakeholders.

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**Professional Development Task Force Meeting** – Members present included: Steve Troxell; Chair,

Chair Steve Troxell began the meeting by asking Bob Pianta to provide a summary of his research. Main points of Bob's work:

- ✓ His research has shown that there is minimal correlation between educational gains for children and the degree or certification of the teacher, or even of a specified curriculum. Far greater in terms of impacting student's achievement and gains is the quality of interaction between teacher and child and how a teacher implements the curriculum. Bob has developed an instrument called the CLASS that measures the quality of interaction in a classroom setting.
- ✓ The effectiveness of a teacher's interactions and instructional practice can best be enhanced through coaching and mentoring. Bob has developed a program called My Teaching Partner that provides both online support as well as one-on-one coaching for feedback and consultation. Bob's research has shown that after three years, the effects of a bachelor's degree typically drop off; ongoing training, support, and mentoring are keys to continued successful teaching.

In discussing professional development, the task force agreed that a strong understanding of child development is critical. Jennifer Stevens suggested that training for teachers dealing with aides, paraprofessionals, and parents would also be helpful.

With regard to licensure, Patty Pitts, DOE, informed the task force that any employee paid for by state funds and employed by a local school board must be licensed (according to state law). The task force suggested that we should recommend licensure for Start Strong teachers only if 1) it is required or 2) it actually indicates high quality teaching for preschoolers.

There was much discussion about alternatives for requirements, but ultimately the group determined that consistent standards should be set and met (even if phased in over a period of time), whether in a public school or private setting. Alternatively, the group felt that there should be provision made for a test and/or observation mechanism for teachers/providers to display the skills/qualifications we seek, even if they don't meet the specific degree requirement.

**Three specific determinations were made:**

- ✓ The core competencies outlined in the Alignment Project's Professional Competencies document should drive the professional development of Start Strong teachers.
- ✓ We should determine a mechanism to organize professional development in a standardized, coordinated, consistent way across settings. This should include workshops, training, community college coursework, and university education programs.
- ✓ The QRS should be implemented as a structure for assessing and promoting quality.

During the discussion, recommendations or thoughts for other task forces emerged:

Finance - Teacher pay for preschool needs to be at a high enough rate to keep them!

Governance - If local school boards govern the Start Strong program, all teachers must be licensed. Therefore, decisions by governance task force will be relevant for decisions made by PD task force.

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**Public Engagement Task Force Meeting –**

*Vision for Virginia's Start Strong Pre-K Program* - Members of the group brainstormed their hopes for Virginia's Start Strong program:

- Services available to all children
- Students include a heterogeneous and diverse group, representing all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups
- Excellence in programming; high quality early education corresponding to research and best practices
- A program which is holistic in nature
- Sustainability of effort through an intentional, comprehensive and blended approach to funding
- Impeccable accountability; thorough and effective collection of data, capturing both information on those served, services provided, and measurement of outcomes
- Program is results-focused; leads to children who are well prepared for success in school and are happy, emotionally secure human beings

**What should a public engagement campaign focused on early education programming...**

- **emphasize?**
  - The early years of life are prime time for establishing a firm foundation for educational success.
  - Providing effective early education programming improves equality of opportunity, reducing the disparities in opportunity between groups.

- Improving and expanding early education is an effective economic investment in Virginia's future, contributing to an intelligent workforce capable of competing in a global economy.
- Offering high quality early education services also contributes to strengthening Virginia's families by assisting them with the heavy responsibilities associated with effectively preparing their children for success.
- Early childhood education is an effective way to support our youngest citizens, giving them the start necessary for lifelong success.
- Virginia is capable of creating an effective system of high quality early childhood education—we can do this!
- Early childhood education should be provided through a public-private partnership, involving all sectors of the community.
- **avoid?** *While the above are effective themes to use, the following approaches should be avoided!*
  - Using any form of guilt
  - Providing too much information, which paints a complex, difficult to understand picture
  - Using verbiage which is not clear or direct, which includes too much early childhood jargon and unfamiliar acronyms
  - Anything that creates an image of serving “those kids.” Instead, the emphasis should be on benefits for all/everybody's children. (For example, even if the program initially targets certain groups, public engagement should talk about how improving the readiness of these children will lead to an improved classroom climate the next year for all children...)
  - Although the program should be excellent, providing high quality education, care should be taken to avoid the idea that taxpayers are paying for a “Cadillac” version, something unnecessarily luxurious.
  - Watch out for anything that sounds like “SOL for pre-K.” Although the jargon associated with “developmentally appropriate practices” won't be effective with the general public, we should be very careful not to create an impression that pre-K will be overly academic or push homework and testing down to the preschool level. Instead, the emphasis should be on providing a sound educational founding that meets the needs of very young children and creates a genuine love of learning among the children.

#### **What do we need to be effective in public engagement efforts?**

- Good data *Note: gather data from existing VPI programs, but use caution in generalizing results to all programs, given the variability in quality that currently exists. We need data from successful programs: What are these programs doing? What are the results they are getting? How can we make this available for every child?*
  - How many 4-year olds? Where are they now? How many parents are currently paying for pre-K? Who are the families most in need of services for their children? What is the impact of the lack of services?
  - What are the results/outcomes of current pre-K programs, including VPI, Head Start, Title I and others?
  - What is the current readiness (or lack of readiness) among children entering kindergarten?
  - What are indicators of the fact that if children start behind, they stay behind—such as gateway testing at various points in time?

- An understanding of the concerns and issues that potential opponents to pre-K may have. *Note: the task force would like to interview individuals and/or conduct focus groups with potential opponents to identify and explore their questions and concerns.*
  - Child care providers
  - Conservatives
  - Budget analysts
  - Others
- Strategies for creating an effective system for collecting improved data in the future.

**Target audiences on which public engagement efforts should focus** *Note: while it would be wonderful to eventually reach all Virginians, given limited time and resources, the task force recognizes the need to plan carefully and strategically, focusing initial public engagement efforts on key groups that have the power and influence to make things happen. At the next meeting, the task force will identify their top few priorities among the groups shown below.*

- Legislators (and those to whom they listen), particularly
  - Members of key legislative committees, such as appropriations and education
  - Republican members of the House of Delegates
  - Senate Republicans
  - Other key legislators
- Parents, particularly groups of parents that vote. Public engagement efforts might include advocacy training, talking points, etc. provided to parents. Targeted groups might include
  - PTA chapters
  - Junior League groups
  - Parents in key legislative districts
  - Parents whose children have benefited from VPI and who might be willing to express their strong convictions about the impact of such services.
- The business community, particularly working in partnership with statewide and local Chambers of Commerce and other influential business organizations.
- The faith community—Particularly in rural areas, the churches are an effective channel for reaching people.
- K-12 and post-secondary educators—We need the voices of these educators, rather than early childhood educators, who become convinced that their work rests on the foundation of effective early childhood education. *Public engagement should include efforts to convince and involve the following:*
  - Superintendents
  - Principals
  - School boards (Virginia School Board Association—if not convinced of long-term educational benefits, will oppose expansion/improvement of pre-K)
  - VEA
- The media, particularly editorial boards of key newspapers, public TV, and leading radio stations *Consider meeting with the VA Pilot and the Roanoke Times.*
- Private child care providers—*This is another group that will oppose the expansion of pre-K, unless they become convinced that their programs can become potential sites and thereby benefit from involvement with pre-K. We asked that the VACCRR Network seek some input from this group as to their questions, concerns, and suggestions.*
- Coalitions with whom we might partner in public engagement efforts (such as child health coalitions, etc)
- Northern Virginia—*members of the task force felt that influential voices from Northern Virginia should be cultivated, given the economic power of that region and its issues/needs related to child care.*

### **Other discussion as to possible strategies that might be effective in Virginia**

- Take legislators out to visit model programs (Alexandria, New River Valley) and/or communities receiving the first three community-based grants (perhaps meet with their coalition steering committees)
- Look for special events already scheduled that might provide “piggy-back” opportunities for presenting information
- Develop inserts and fact sheets to insert in publications such as Chamber of Commerce publications and the newsletters of other organizations
- Assist in planning/hosting community legislative forums, and ensure that all such meetings have some individuals prepared to ask questions about elected officials stance on early childhood education
- Identify the top three potential sources of opposition—such as conservative legislators, conservative newspapers, and private child care providers—and reach out to them, asking such things as
  - What are their concerns and issues related to pre-K?
  - What would it take to persuade them to support the improvement and expansion of pre-K?
  - How could pre-K be offered in ways that support your interests?

### **Use two-pronged approach: top-down (cultivate visible champions) and bottom-up (develop grassroots advocacy network, partnering with existing networks)**

- Possible champions might include
    - Governor Tim Kaine
    - Paul Hirschbiel (South Hampton Roads)
    - Angelica Light (SHR)
    - Katie Couric
    - Tim Reid
    - Others?
  - *Next meeting: Identify grassroots networks with whom we could partner*
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**Standards Task Force Meeting** - Members introduced themselves and gave their background. Members present included:

Renee Dino, Chair, gave an overview of the groups work and led the task force in consensus-building by asking “What is our vision for what this program will look like in 5 years? 10 years?”

In order to facilitate ideas members completed the following question for brainstorming: “What does a “high quality” pre-k program look like...

*At the community level?*

- One-stop shop for 4-year-olds
- Local board (also commitment?)
- Community volunteers
- Collaboration with local colleges
- Agencies/non-profits collaborative
- Agreement to value children
- Educated communities
- Providers in communities—all providers are in ECE association
- Grass roots leadership and involvement
- Community partnership agreement/support
- Community match
- Encouraging public/private partnerships



- Public relations
- ECE committee on school boards
- Collaboration with health system
- Central screening/identification/outreach
- Local flexibility (based on community needs, etc.?)
- Need web access

*At the program level?*

- Leadership—dedicated director, appropriate training/qualification (Masters degree)
- Physical plant/facilities designed for 4-year-olds
- Strong collaborative relationships
- Staff evaluations
- Comprehensive
- Staff development plans
- BA degree plan
- Highly qualified staff
- Child-focused and not standards-focused
- Program attuned to needs of children—developmentally appropriate
- Monitoring system
- Use research-based curricula
- Use best practices in developing program
- Collaboration (continuous with colleges and schools on appropriate practices)
- Teacher training programs with an ECE emphasis
- Continuing education
- Clear governance

*At the classroom level?*

- Certification (BS or BA) teachers with ECE coursework
- Standards (e.g., VA Foundation Blocks)
- Appropriate classroom design
- Learning embedded through play
- Appropriate curriculum—systematic and organized
- Curriculum articulation with public school
- Outcomes measurement
- Warm, accepting, teacher-child interactions
- Teacher/student ratio
- Class size
- Assessment (screening and observation?)
- Volunteers
- Appropriate materials
- Mentorship programs
- Well trained instructional assistant and additional help in the classroom if necessary (for emotionally disturbed or severe behavior problems not yet identified by special education)
- Positive teacher-child interaction
- Developmentally appropriate practice/curriculum identification
- Involvement with parents

*At the child level?*

- Enters school eager to learn
- Respected and appreciated for individual differences—diversity (child feels)
- Child-focused, not standards-focused

- Child is developmentally ready
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum
- Full inclusion
- Stimulate motivation for learning
- Incorporates playtime
- Fun, experiential learning
- Physical activity
- Social/emotional development
- Strong peer and adult relationships
- Health/nutrition
- Strong literacy direct instruction
- Teacher-child relationship
- Peer interaction
- Hands-on learning
- 7 domains as determined by the field

*At the family level?*

- Parents must be part of the 4-year-old programs
- Family partnership agreement
- Parent council
- Parent education/training/involvement
- Father involvement
- Early foundation/graduation program
- Family communication system
- ESL support
- Integrated family support services pre age 4
- Health, mental health
- Informed and aware parents
- Well aware of resources/referral program
- Feel supported by community
- Parents as advocates (feel empowered)
- Cultural awareness
- Parents are experts on their child(ren)

Group members then read the article “Consider Structural Standards vs. Process Standards by Bob Pianta and reported on the big ideas and implications of the groups work.

*Big Ideas:*

- Process standards more strongly related to student achievement than structural standards
- In-service professional development component
- Classroom observation done systematically are prescriptive and can improve quality (program monitoring)
- Quality must include measure of social-emotional variables in addition to academic skills

*Implications for our work:*

- Professional development group needs to look at these articles
- Preschoolers in schools—attendance should count, etc. (i.e., include their data with the rest of the school)—need accountability of following children
- Development of standards that reflect these findings

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During discussion, members jotted questions they have and other information they need to continue our work. Questions included:

- Who will be served? (only those 4-year-olds whose parents choose)
  - We need to find a way to begin counting Pre-K as part of the school enrollment. They are in the building. The Start Strong Council should make it important so PreK will be important at the school level.
  - We need to develop Best Practices for 4-year-old education/learning.
  - What is/are the framework (parameters) in establishing “standards”?
  - How soon would some funding be available? 1 year? 2 years? 10 years?
  - How will we make sure that health and nutrition issues are addressed by our task force?
- Seemed to be lightly included in our discussion.

Group Members then broke into five groups to facilitate further discussion before the next meeting. These groups are as follows:

Curriculum/Learning Standards Instructional Assessment

1. Iris Leguizamo
2. Cheryl Strobel
3. Lola McDowell
4. Novella

Evaluation and Monitoring

1. Angela Smith
2. Scott Kizner

Environmental Factors and Facilities

1. Badiyah Wajiid
2. Jeff Caruso (or another Catholic school representative)

Program Development/Teacher qualifications

1. Nancy Moga
2. Carol Grace
3. Jean Chase
4. Mavis Brown

Comprehensive/Support Services

1. Tanya High-Brooks
2. John Morgan

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All task force meetings concluded at 3PM. The next meeting of the task forces is scheduled for September 20, 2006 from 10AM-3PM at John Tyler Community College.